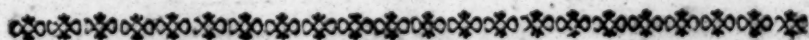


T W O
D I S C O U R S E S.



SEPTEMBER 1944

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T W O
DISCOURSES.

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY
UNITARIAN COLLECTION

I. On the Sufficiency of the Scriptures, and
the Right of private Judgment.

II. On the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Both lately preached in the Country.

By a Friend to TRUTH and LIBERTY.

Humanum est errare.

Nil tam voluntarium, quam Religio.

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L O N D O N.

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T W O

DISCOURSES

1. On the Faith of the Disciples and
the Right of Private Judgment

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5. On the Faith of the Disciples

6. On the Faith of the Disciples

7. On the Faith of the Disciples

8. On the Faith of the Disciples

ROMANS I. 16.

I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOS-
PEL OF CHRIST, FOR IT IS THE
POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVA-
TION.

SUCH was the language of
the apostle of the Gentiles,
and such ought to be the language
of every disciple of our crucified
Lord, the Son of the most High.
Not simply the voice of the
tongue, but of the heart. That
supreme Being, who reigneth
above, must be worshipped in
Spirit and in *truth*, if we hope for
the approbation of an all-wise,
and the reward of an all-powerful
B God.

God. If the professors of Christianity must needs be told what the gospel of Christ really is, that very gospel (in express terms) answers for itself; *it is the power of God unto salvation.* Well then might our apostle, with full assurance, and the heart felt satisfaction of an approving conscience, with extacy cry out, *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.* Why should he blush to own himself a follower of that Lamb, who *came not to do his own will, but the will of his God and our God?* Why disown that gospel, in which God has revealed to us the terms of our acceptance, and given us the power of securing our salvation, on the sure basis of his unalterable justice?

That

That the knowledge to inform ourselves, or the spirit to declare and follow the truth, as we find it in the gospel, should dwell among us in smaller measure than did with the apostles, is not a matter of wonder. But that common honesty, and a spirit which would look down upon the favours of a bigotted superior, should be so rare a matter in this famed land of liberty, is truly pitiable !

We plainly see, and in disputations with the followers of the Roman faith, warmly urge the sufficiency of the scriptures for the salvation of man ; and that without the aid of human authority, that one volume, the covenant between the Son of God, and the

inhabitants of this lower world, containeth all things necessary, and is, of itself, sufficient for the reconciling of man to his offended God. Yet when we (who still plume ourselves upon being Protestants) come to controvert questions among ourselves, and reduce our boasted principles to practice, how often do we find this cornerstone of Protestantism dispensed with. The decrees of councils; the dogmatical opinions of reverend, but fallible fathers; the determinations of a body of interested men, who have been dignified with the name of the church, are ever had recourse to. Human authority is artfully blended with divine, and the monstrous medley, (backed by pro-

protection from the civil power) imposed upon our understandings, and secured by the inflicting of pains and penalties, by suspensions and deprivations. The benign spirit of the New Testament is waved for the more turbulent and persecuting one of the Koran of *Mahomet*. Christianity is then so disguised, that a primitive disciple, would not know her as the work of the same master. Where will the blindness of man carry us! When will their perverseness suffer us to turn unto Thee, thou our only Protector here, and Judge hereafter!

To employ much time in an encomium on the excellency of the gospel, would not at this time
be

be to pay it any compliment, or be doing justice to the good sense of a Protestant assembly. Yet let me, in so many words, most earnestly and affectionately entreat, and endeavour to persuade you, to trust yourself with that volume alone, and there to read your duty to God, your neighbour, and yourself, without other comment than from the candid informer. So highly do I reverence the inspired pages, that I am satisfied they will speak more abundantly in their own favour, than if laboured volumes were employed to tell their sterling worth. Words are wanting ; your own senses will direct you to pronounce the whole, the *book of books*.

How

How is the reformation of this country from the errors of Rome to be justified, if we do not abide by that leading principle, The sufficiency of the Scriptures? What better claim have the wild chimeras of idle-headed churchmen to our implicit submission, than the traditions of the Roman see? The artful interpolations and omissions of the Papists, surely deserve the same credit as some of the wire-drawn misconstructions, the very fallacious arguments of some of our own church. Alas! it is equally true of the whole, that *they are all gone out of the way; they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their*
tongues

*tongues have they used deceit ; the poison of asps is under their lips ; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known**. But inconsistency is almost inseparable from humanity. While at the head of Protestantism stand the sufficiency of the holy scriptures, and the right of private judgment in religious matters: While these dignify our church with the name of Christian, and declare her members consistent with their pretensions to a separation from the power and influence of the Roman pontiff: While these are

* Rom. III. 12—17.

our boast and our glory, how is it to be lamented that we do not atchieve the deed? While a further reformation is acknowledged to be necessary, why do we not proceed to the arduous, but great and glorious, the immortal undertaking, the reducing an ecclesiastical establishment nearer to the standard of scripture, that inexhaustible fountain, from whence flow living waters? As we most happily differ from the Romanists, in having the bible open to all, why do we yet conform to them, in receiving the addition of human explications? This, like the refiners of valuable ore, is mixing dross with the most pure of metals. This is neither the wisdom of the serpent, nor yet the innocence of

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the dove. Well may we be charged with *self-adulation*, while we vaunt ourselves on plumes which are not our own ; and declare our *imagined excellency* to be *real*. The moderate and discerning part of mankind will pity our folly, and laugh at our ignorance. Why should the sound learning, the more liberal cast of mind in this, stoop to the absurdities of the doctors in jargon of the last century ? Knowledge has been progressive in divinity, as well as in the other sciences. Not that the religion of Jesus is variable and uncertain in any degree, but because the doctrines and commandments of men have been imposed upon mankind for the word of God. How readily would most men

men join in the laugh at a physician who should shut his ears to the many discoveries which have been made of late years in medicine, and prescribe by the rules of two ages back? Why then should I look for the Christian religion in any other books than the Old and New Testament, though recommended by the learned of a Hampton-Court-conference, and countenanced by the authority of the *powers of the world*? The ignorance of former times might have excused, but the lights of these days prevent even an apology.

To conclude ; as a minister of the New Testament, let me remind you, in the very words of

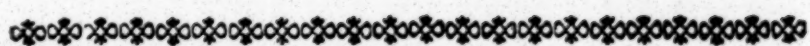
our inspired apostle, that *the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation*. And let me most earnestly entreat you, to answer all the arguments which art and sophistry can propose, with the undaunted courage of one who *can give an account of the faith that is in him*; speak aloud with St. Paul, *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*. This will be the most convincing proof of your thorough belief of the important truths contained in that gospel; and a life regulated by its most wise and righteous precepts will be the most incontestible evidence of your sincerity. While speculative divinity, an attention to the abstruse parts of the written word, employs the mind, it is
too

too much inclined, absolutely to engross the attention. *The ways of his laws, and the works of his commandments,* are the terms of our acceptance. (These will avail when the reveries of the book-worm shall change his shallow-grounded religion into infidelity, by reason of the weakness of man's attempting to fathom the secret councils of the Almighty.) Sufficient is known to us, to make us both good and happy; and further, reason and revelation itself forbid us to go. It is possible to become infidels by thinking too much, as well as by not thinking at all. Practical Christianity is the criterion of our last sentence. This will, through the mercy of God, and the mediation
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of our blessed Redeemer, Christ Jesus, bring us to that place, which will be the eternal dwelling of those who have *stood fast in that liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free.* Now unto him, &c.



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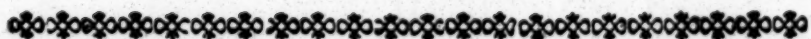


S E R M O N II.

From MAT. XXVIII. 18, 19.

A N D

Preached on TRINITY SUNDAY.



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MATTHEW XXVIII. 18, 19.

JESUS CAME AND SPAKE UNTO THEM, SAYING, ALL POWER IS GIVEN UNTO ME IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH. GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST.

THE latter part of my text hath very frequently been urged by the advocates for the opinion of Athanasius, on the subject of this day's meditation. I have repeated the whole, that you may not judge by piecemeal,

meal, or be led into opinions by detached pieces of our Lord's discourse. The inspired volume is our only resource. That, as Christians, we firmly believe; would to God we better discharged the excellent moral duties, with which it every where abounds. These, instead of forming us into sceptics, are very weighty (nay would, to a reasonable mind, be alone sufficient) evidences of its having been the united labour of the inspired penmen. A fact which we find related there, tho' the limits of the human understanding cannot comprehend, yet amply merits our assent, because *in the volume of the book it is written.*

The

The contentions which have attended the establishing the doctrine of the Trinity, have deeply stained with blood the history of every kingdom where it has been broached, for a succession of centuries. “ O! that we could
 “ draw an impervious veil over
 “ the dreadful scenes that fol-
 “ lowed, and hide for ever from
 “ the eyes of men, those excom-
 “ munications, imprisonments,
 “ confiscations, banishments, in-
 “ surrections, murders, massacres,
 “ and tortures brought on Chri-
 “ stians, by one another, for not
 “ understanding and professing,
 “ what all parties acknowledged
 “ could not be understood*.”

* Dr. Robertson's Attempt, 3d edit. p. 41.

Till the fourth century after Christ, we have no account of the doctrine itself; the very name by which it was called was not then in being, and cannot be found any where in the Old or New Testament. *Athanasius* of *Alexandria* first advanced it at the Council of Nice, in the year 325 after our Saviour's passion. To go through the intermediate steps of the history, would be little better than a detail of the bitterest contentions, such as would be a disgrace to humanity. This novelty of the young ecclesiastic, was however as warmly opposed as it had been unadvisedly advanced. All that remains for us, is to mark the conduct of the litigants, and view it with the abhorrence it deserves,

serves, and carefully to avoid any likeness of it in our own. It very nearly behoves us candidly and impartially to consider, whether we shall be justified by scripture. We must ever have an eye on that record of the will of our blessed Master, without regarding the doctrines of men.

Go ye therefore, (said our Saviour to his disciples) and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. This carries an appearance of an equality and coeternity ; and hath accordingly been much insisted on, as direct to the point. But let an honest, and unbiaſſed judgment, read the former part of the text, the very
intro-

introduction to these words; *all power is given unto me*. The person receiving, must, in this case clearly be inferior to the person giving: and yet the person who spake the one, spake the other also. The most natural and obvious meaning of the being *baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, seems to be, “ that those
 “ thus baptized, are the disciples
 “ of these three, and willing to
 “ be so called; that is, they acknowledge these three to be
 “ the founders and authors of
 “ the religion they profess; that
 “ it proceeded, or took its rise
 “ from the Father; was taught,
 “ or revealed by the Son; and
 “ was clearly explained, and
 “ con-

“ confirmed by the Holy Ghost,
 “ or Spirit.*”

Another passage in St. John's first epistle, is generally thought to be agreeable to the commonly received notion. *There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.* The most exact and industrious enquirer † into the state of the original copy, hath sufficiently proved this very passage to be an interpolation. In the earlier copies of this epistle it is not to be found, and was, doubtless in-

* Illustration of the New Testament, in loc. p. 191.

† Sir Isaac Newton.

serted by the partizans of *Athanasius*. But granting it to stand ; the best critics have understood the words, *these three are one*, not as one person or substance ; but, that these three, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, agree in one, *one testimony*^{to} the truth. And this sense is agreeable to several hundred other passages, without being attended with difficulties, and unintelligible distinctions. *My Father is greater than I* : and again, *I am not come to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me*, were the words of Christ himself. Was this the place, I could offer abundance of authorities to my purpose ; tho' there is indeed an appearance of them on both sides of the question.

tion. But the doubtful passages must ever give way to the clear and positive ones.

After all that has been said on this subject within the last 1400 years, notwithstanding the number of pages, I may say the thousands of volumes which have been written, we remain just where we were : we are not one jot wiser, except the knowledge of our ignorance be called wisdom. All parties have alternately been called heretics ; numbers of both have been led martyrs to the stake, when their adversaries had the sanction of the sovereign magistrate. Almost every Christian virtue hath been violated to establish it. Charity, patience,
E per-

perseverance, humanity and benevolence, brotherly-love, and good will towards all on whom the Almighty hath stamped the figure of man, have been turned adrift, and made way for the distinguishing characteristics of furies, rather than of rational beings. “ The “ armour of hell hath” in this case most apparently “ been worn “ in the cause of heaven.” By these means, Christianity hath greatly suffered from the intemperate zeal of mistaken men, if not of venal and interested bigots. Bigotry ever turns a deaf ear to truth ; she is active on the side of hell ; scarce knowing why she sells herself to the blinded mercenaries of the prince of darkness. Though she cannot
con-

convince, she will continue to impose. Indulgent heaven hath however, I trust, now banished her these kingdoms, though too apparent that indifference hath succeeded her. It is moderation and candor which must ultimately guide us to the glorious mean.

What conclusion is to be drawn from the hypothesis of *Athanasius* favourable to the Christian cause, I know not. Both parties may be alike good Christians, while they will let others enjoy their opinions, which neither affect their lives or society, without molestation. Neither of them deserve the glorious name of disciples of the blessed Jesus, while

phrensy instead of reason directs their actions. In the opposite scale, the worship of the one supreme Being is maintained, which doubtless furnishes the mind with higher notions of the power and infinity of the Father of all ; and this worship is through the mediation of his blessed Son, that he will send the Holy Ghost unto us, that is, assist us with his Holy Spirit.

In the public service of our church, we find parts which are agreeable to both opinions. Were they uniform, with a sufficient latitude for people of differing sentiments on the one subject, of which we are all alike ignorant, the true spirit of Christianity would

would appear more eminently in them. Restraints upon the will are shackles, which only serve as a mask for hypocrisy. Wolves may come to us in sheep's cloathing, but they are not less to be feared on that account ; they are more likely to surprize us, and consequently more dangerous enemies.

It hath been well observed by a late very learned and worthy prelate * of our own church, that our lives may be orthodox, tho' our faith may not. And as our lives must be the touch-stone to try our final sentence, what matters the little difference of opi-

* William Wake.

nions in these mysterious points? Sincerity, in our religious professions is that one article on which I should be inclined to rest the whole. Every part of natural, as well as revealed religion, join in this; if we will view the law of nature, and the law of the gospel, in that amiable and engaging figure they wear, when void of the disguise with which artful men have coloured them. With sincerity in our religious professions, and a life subordinate thereto, I trust all mankind will be within the limits of the mercy of our God and our Lord. What deficiencies are here wanting, each man is himself accountable for. We are free agents and rational beings; but if we circumscribe

scribe our free agency by a fence of our own raising, and abuse the reason which God hath given us, we cease to be men, in the most important sense of the word. When we compliment any set of men with our senses, we pay a price which bears no proportion to the purchase. If *we gain the whole world*, and all its bewitching gratifications, and *yet lose our soul*, what shall it profit us? Elegantly is the question put, *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

The belief of every Christian doctrine, the practice of every Christian virtue, may yet be found, where there are some doubts respecting this one point.
Every

Every man must judge for himself: it is the privilege of reason, the great palladium of Protestantism. (It was impossible from this place to lay the arguments before you, without abridging them, and thereby greatly injuring them. I have therefore dwelt more upon the general nature of the two opinions. Every man's own senses must determine for himself.) While the question is thus surrounded and embarrassed with clouds of darkness, which the finite and limited understandings, the short sightedness of man, cannot perforate; we ought with the greatest diffidence to censure others who differ from us, let our opinions be inclined either to the one side or the other.

other. It is seriously to be lamented, that some of our predecessors have been too positive in their injunctions. But we must ever remember, and deeply imprint upon our minds—We must not fail to nourish and defend that dearest pledge which is now left to us—a scriptural right to private judgment. And let me add; by our silence we should betray our Christian liberty; by concealing our opinion, we should contradict the doctrine of St. Paul to the Galatians, when he tells them to *stand fast in that liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free.*

Now unto Him, who is the
only King of Kings, and Lord
F of

of Lords, who alone hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach, whom no man hath seen, nor can see, unto Him be ascribed honour, praise, power, and dominion everlasting.

F I N I S.



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